THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (d) The work of gauge conversion of Saharsa junction-Forbesgang and Sakri-Laukaha Bazaar-Nirmali section has been included in the Supplementary Budget 2003-04 of the Ministry of Railways at an anticipated cost of Rs. 355.81 crore, to be funded through defence funds. The foundation stones for the two sections had been laid on 8.2.2004 by the then Defence Minister. An outlay of Rs. 10 crore has been proposed for this work in Budget 2005-2006 of the Ministry of Railways.

Development of Hi-tech weapons system with US Co-operation

2981. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether US has offered co-operation in joint development of hi-tech weapons system, including missile defence shield;

(b) whether it is true that US offered to India F-18s and other nuclear technology as compensation to its sale of F-16s to Pakistan; and

(c) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The United States (US) has conveyed its readiness to cooperate with India in the sale, production and joint development of defence equipment, including in areas of advanced defence technologies. This has included a limited interaction on missile defence.

(b) to (c) The US has responded to a Request for Information (RFI) for medium (below 20 tonnes) Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MRCA) clearing US manufacturers of F-16 and F-18 aircraft for the Request for Proposal (RFP). The US have also offered an energy dialogue which could include cooperation on nuclear energy for civilian use.

Replacement of Cheetah and Chetak helicopters

2982. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is true that Cheetah and Chetak helicopters have become obsolete and are not able to address the surveillance system in high altitude regions;